8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RHI Caucasia RHI

III. THE FAMILY

Chapter IX

The Offspring

§ 1. CONCEPTION

833 Herodotus has accused the Lesghians of copulating "in public as beasts are wont to do."[1] Such an accusation, however, is absolutely false. Even the slightest sign of affection between husband and wife is tabooed by customary law throughout the Caucasus, except, of course, in strictest secrecy.[2]

Owing to the delicate nature of the subject, very little material has been gathered by the explorers, even though these matters may have a deep sociological significance, as, for example, the extent of birth control, or a psychological and religious significance, such as, for example, the extent of sexual taboos, voluntary abstinence, etc.

841 171 Astoundingly widespread is the taboo of marital intercourse at times of menstruation. A glance at Frazer's or Westermarck's classical works[3] will suffice to convince us of the universality of this prohibition. This same horror of menstruous blood is found in the Caucasus also. However, very little data are at our disposal. We are not told how long these "monthly" periods last, nor the extent of the horror. The Pshavs and the Khevsurs have little stone hovels *(samrevlo)* situated in an open field,[4] (or now usually next to the home),[5] where the unclean woman must stay during her monthly periods. Kovalevskij attributes the practice to Zoroastrianism.[6] He does not seem to be aware that such segregation and "hovels" are found in other parts of the world, where Zoroastrianism has never been known. The fact that the "unclean" woman must wash herself in cow's urine,[7] however, most probably has been taken over from the ancient Iranian religion.

[1] Potocki, *Voyage dans les steps d'Astrakhan et du Caucase*, I, p. 240.
[2] Cf. *infra*, pp. 63, 175 f.
[3] Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged), pp. 207—210; 595—607. Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, I, p. 230.
[4] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 236.
[5] Hahn, *Bilder aus dem Kaukasus*, pp. 72 f.
[6] *Zakon*, I, pp. 98 f.
[7] Cf. *Zakon*, I. pp. 83—122.
The ancient Iranian religion considered cows as sacred animals.

p. 138

("Lion"), *Vari* ("Vulture"), etc. are intended to deceive the evil spirits, who are able to take the life of the child only if they can call it by its true name.[58]

4. Segregation

A Lesghian woman becomes unclean through childbirth, and hence the father may not be present at the birth nor during the entire period of uncleaness, which lasts for several weeks.[59] Child-bearing renders the mother unclean in Ossetia as well. The Mountain Georgians have special birthhouses for expectent mothers. In Svaneti the mother is unclean for 40 days,[60] in Khevsuria and Pshavia a few days longer.[61] A woman can be cleansed (in Khevsuria and Pshavia) by washing her hair in cow's urine.[62] In Ossetia a woman is considered unclean for six weeks after childbirth. During this period she is not allowed to work, except to sweep the floor and look after the children. The marital act is likewise forbidden.[63]

5. Weaning

Very little data is available regarding weaning of children and taboos during the period of lactation. As a general rule, the Lesghians wean their children at the age of five or six.[64] The Avars usually do not wean them before they have reached the use of reason.[65] Pshav children are weaned at the age of four.

6. Fire-place Ceremony

We have seen what an important part the hearth played in the marriage ceremonies of the Northwestern Caucasians, the Ingushi and Ossetes. By circling round the hearth the bride officially became a member of the family. We should also expect a birth ceremony of some sort or other at the fire-place, by which the infant would likewise be officially recognized as a fully fledged member of the family and by which the newborn would come in contact with the ancestors and receive their protection. We find such a ceremony among the neighbouring peoples of Iranian stock, the Ossetes[66] and the Kurds.[67] Though the hearth

---

[58] Pčelina, "Rodil'nye obyčai u Osetin," SE, 1937, No. 4, p. 98.
For Ossetine naming ceremony, see *op. cit.*, pp. 96 ff.
Could not this fondness for animal names be a vestige of individual totemism?

[59] Kovalevskij, "Iranian Culture in the Caucasus," *The Archaeological Review*, June, 1888, cited by Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, p. 202. See also *op. cit.*, I, pp. 97 f, 139 f.

[60] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 110.

[61] G. Demidov, *V uščelijach pervobytnoj gruzii (Chevsuretija)*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1930, p. 16. Požidaev (*Gorcy severnago kavkaza*, p. 107) says that the Khevsur mother is "unclean" for 30 days.

[62] Demidov, *l. c.* After delivery, the mother must remain in the birth-hut for two weeks; after that she must live in the stable for about five weeks. S. I. Makalatija, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Today the Pshavs use holy water instead of urine (*ibid.*).

[63] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[64] Nansen, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

[65] Erckert, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

[66] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[67] Jankó, *Néprajzi, etc.* Zichy's *Kaukázusi és középázsiai utazásai*, p. 63.